

vengeance." He laughed as usual. "Meanwhile, I'm waiting out of—never mind what it produces the blue light. I'll make enough in ten minutes or so. Take a can back, and have a look at the Houses of Parliament. You'll see something!"

"You mean—you have a photograph of them?"

"Yes," he laughed again. There was something devious, I think, in his laugh. It pleased me to see him so pleased. "When the clock strikes ten," he added. I took a taxi back to Westminster Bridge, and called into the crowd round the place where Lady Constance had been speaking. A man was speaking now. He was pressing the same point: that every one must make himself or herself into a detective to defensive subjects.

"Take nobody for granted," he begged, "not your father, or your mother or your brother, or your sister, or your own familiar friend. The letter in the Times was posted in London. The arch criminal has a typewriter and he has scientific appliances." Ten, began striding. "He—or she—is a person of scientific attainments: a person without religion, a—me—"

I suppose he said "My God!" But his words were drowned in an awful, unexpected cry. The lighted clock, the house tower, the noble buildings were gone as quietly and quickly as a picture from a screen, and where they had stood one saw, close by, it was a first night, and the clock tickled there. I remember wondering, vaguely, whether man was the master of the stars.

After the cry the crowd erupted like a live mad tide. I was whirled round and round, followed and struck. A heap of people who fell—most of them were killed—grew so large that, under the lee of it, I could take shelter from the human waves. The speakers were just on the other side of the heap, and as the crowd tried to avoid it, they, too, were swept from the very midst of the crush; but when the man who had spoken mounted his stool and shouted to the people to keep cool and go slowly, he was rushed over, and another heap formed over him, as happened whenever any one fell.

Lady Constance mounted by something, and begged the crowd not to rush, and then everybody would be safe. Her voice was no longer music, but a rough scream, and her hat had gone and her hair hung loose. She was knocked over, too, but the fall of the crowd had come. I fought through it, using my fists, and tumbled a little heap aside and pulled her out. I helped her to her feet, and supported her while she got breath. That was the second misfortune in my plans. If I had let her be smothered—it really did not occur to me—Harvey and I would be masters of this world to-day.

III

SHE was only bruised and shaken, she declared.

"I am glad to find one brave man," she told me. "We few who are brave have need of one another, Mr. —"

She looked at me.

"Randall," I said. It was the first name that came into my head.

"Mr. Randall, let us see if we can save any one."

We rescued a good many from the heaps. As they recovered they went on with the rescue, and I went with Lady Constance towards the ruins of the Houses of Parliament. I say "ruins," but there was no debris. The superstructure had disappeared. The foundations were unharmed, not being included in the pyre.

The assembly itself had not been annihilated, but some were killed and many were injured by falling to the ground, or into the cellars, when the masonry disappeared. And, yet, according to Harvey, it was still "going on." Everything that ever was or will be goes on, I suppose; only we do not know.

I worked with those who were injured in recovering the rest. Lady Constance seemed to direct it all. She went down into the cellars herself and carried injured men upon her slender shoulders. Her jacket was torn and she was disheveled. She did not look the high-bred lady now, but very much a woman. She had a color, and she was very beautiful.

"Come and see me to-morrow," she said, when our work was done. "If we are both left. There will be work to do. If one of us is gone—God bless you! Come and help!"

"Yes," I said. "I am a reporter. You want to rouse the people. Well, popular enthusiasm centers round a personality; especially a woman. I shall describe what you have done to-night, and—let me come in the morning, and take a photograph of you to go with the article."

I meant a psyrgraph!

"Very well," she sighed. "If I seem to have a power to move people," she said, "it is because I try to do what he would have done. Say that in your report. A good man lives when he is dead. Good night, Mr.—my friend."

She gave me her hand; and a kind little smile. I pressed her hand in both mine. That was the third mistake in our plans; the one that was irreparable.

I told Harvey what had happened;

what he would want to know of it. He said that I had done well. He did not agree that I had made a mistake in rescuing Lady Constance.

"The effect of removing her will be much greater," he said. "That it had better be done quickly. You must get the psyrgraph early in the morning. She is dangerous."

I took her home in Park Lane at ten o'clock. I found the newly chosen prime minister, the old one and vanished, and several members of the cabinet there. She introduced me, and they shook hands.

I believe you are right in your proposal, Mr. Randall," the prime minister said. "This is the time for a popular uprising, and Lady Constance is likely to organize it. The annihilator, as he calls himself, does not appear to attack women. Photograph her by all means."

"With your permission," I said. "I will photograph you all, and if you will give me any message to circulate with the photographs it shall go out."

He gave me a long message to the people, but Lady Constance smiled at aside.

"Say this," she told me. "The year has not been read will do the rest."

Then I "sprung" her. "Sprung!" then all. I would come back, I promised, to take my part in the work when the photographs were distributed to the press.

IV

I FOUND Harvey in the laboratory working his psyrgraph, lighting the blue light of destruction on to one psyrgraph after another.

Some newspapers lay around him on the floor.

"Check up on the whole army," he said. "To make every one in London who can't see his hand, and to search everywhere and into everything. The United States is proposing to send over assistance. I've psyrgraphs of three of the 'bombers.' They'll not. The president of the French Republic is holding a council to consider sending help." He put a psyrgraph in the slot. "There goes the president!" he snapped, and the blue light shone out. "Have you got her?"

"Yes," I said. "I'll develop them now. I've some others, too."

I told him their names, and he nodded. I went to the little sink in the corner, and developed my plates. The process was a rapid one, taking only a few seconds.

The picture of Lady Constance was very clear. I watched it come out as the acid ate into the waxen card. The psyrgraphs, as I have said, were indented. The lines seemed to eat into my heart, as the acid ate into the wax.

"Look here, Harvey," I said abruptly. "You told me I could take what I liked from the world. I'm not going to back out, or spoil the business by mawkish sentiment. But—give me your word that you will bring her back some day? I dare say I'm a fool."

He turned round to me, and regarded me curiously, and not unkindly.

"Oh, I don't know!" he said. "What a man wants is what he wants. Yes, I will bring her back. I want you entirely with me, Brownlow, and I am not afraid that you will be mawkish. Give me your word not to restore her till it's safe and I'll show you how to do it."

I gave him my word, and he showed me how to produce the yellowish-pink light that brought things back to our senses—the things that "went on" all the time. He illustrated the process with a chair that stood in the laboratory, and a barometer that hung on the wall.

I gave him the psyrgraph of Lady Constance. He put it in the slot, and turned on the blue light. It looked as if she was crying. Then I suppose I fainted.

When I came to, Harvey hurried me out to take more psyrgraphs, and he

locked up his rooms and went out for the same purpose. It was necessary to do enough to disorganize the whole administration, he explained, and to stop the domestic visits, or we should be undone.

I had been out for an hour, when newspaper boys came by, on bicycles, carrying bundles of papers and shouting:

"Special edition! Annihilation of War Office and Admiralty. Disappearance of French President and Lady Constance Harford. Two thousand scientists arrested!"

Others called out: "German Emperor offers an armistice!" Some sandwich men were distributing handbills advertising the departure of numerous vessels to France, and of special trains to the provinces. The return halves were to be available "on the restoration of lawful government, or within fourteen days thereafter."

I returned to our flat at one o'clock, as agreed, on the way I met parties of police taking away persons suspected of science. I recognized Professor Runton, the electrical expert, and the chemist at the corner of our street, among them. When I reached the street itself, I found that it was lined with soldiers, and that parties were visiting the houses. An officer stopped me, and examined my camera. He called a sergeant of engineers.

"There's something queer about this apparatus," he said. "You're in the photographic section, aren't you, Johnson? Look at it."

The sergeant saluted, and inspected the camera; and then the plates that I had taken.

"It's not photography, sir," he said; "and I see a 'positive' of Lady Constance Harford." I was carrying it about with me for security. "It's cut into a sort of waxy card; and the papers say that she has disappeared!"

"Take him to the commission at once," the officer said. "Don't waste a second," and they hurried me off.

I looked up at the window of the laboratory—our flat was only a few doors away—and saw Harvey covering us with his camera. It flashed upon me that he would "graph" us, and then wipe out the party—myself and all! The plate of Lady Constance would go, and then he could never restore her, and she would "go on," wandering as a disembodied spirit, till the term of her life was over.

I think I went mad for the moment. I struggled to get free; shouted that I knew the annihilator, and would tell them everything; implored them to hasten and save Harvey before he could destroy us all.

"And Lady Constance?" I cried. "And Lady Constance! He can't bring her back without that!" I tried to snatch the psyrgraph from the sergeant's hand; but half a dozen men seized me and carried me by my legs and arms and waist.

"I believe we've got one of them!" the sergeant said.

And then the sergeant and the men were gone from the world, and I dropped upon the pavement with a thud. It was in St. James's Square, just outside Cleveland House. My "camera" lay on the pavement beside me, and the case of finished plates. The psyrgraph of Lady Constance that had been in the sergeant's hand was gone. I gathered up the things, and set off for our flats—they



They are ordering up the whole army to seize everybody in London.

were in Jermyn Street—at a run.

I found people running out of it, and they shouted to me not to go there. All the searchers who went that way, they shrieked, had been annihilated. I went straight on, and into the laboratory, and dropped into the armchair. For the moment my strength had completely gone.

Harvey looked at me with a friendly smile, and went to the sideboard and got out the brandy.

"That was a narrow squeak, old man!" he said, almost with affection. "I happened to see you, and got a psyrgraph. Of course I cut you out, and the camera and plates, before I annihilated." He poured out the brandy with a soft gurgle. "A very narrow squeak! I think we're safe for a while now. I've been graphing searchers all the morning, and I've wiped out thousands. They won't come this way for a bit. Come, pull yourself together and drink it. You'll be all right in a minute."

I drank the brandy, and dropped back in the chair.

"You have wiped out the psyrgraph of Lady Constance," I said. "We can't bring her back."

It was only possible to take one psyrgraph from each "photograph," so I had no duplicate.

He puffed out his cheeks and blew. He had that way when he thought.

"I can bring the psyrgraph back," he said slowly; "but I don't know where it would reappear. The—ghost, we'll say—of the man who had it may wander. I suppose he could carry it about with him. I don't know. He might drop it at the moment. I really don't know. I'll cut it out of the psyrgraph of the group and restore it separately. Go round to the place where he disappeared, and see if it returns there."

I left him cutting at the psyrgraph with a miraculously fine fret-saw, and went back to the square. I stood staring at the pavement where the sergeant had disappeared. The psyrgraph was not there—and then it was!

There was a piece of skin—the tiniest scrap of nail and flesh—adhering to it. The fret-saw had not been quite exact. The psyrgraph was cracked slightly. Harvey said that this would not hurt Lady Constance, and did not matter.

"And now," he said, "put it away for a little while. Some day you shall bring her back; when you can offer her the queenship of half the world!"

"You are merciful to my weakness, Harvey," I said; and he laughed as usual; but there was a touch of softness in the laugh.

"A man wants—what he wants," he said. "We've wasted half an hour—and that may lose the empire of the earth—over a woman! Well, you'll find it harder to rule her, perhaps! Now, Brownlow, we can't waste any more time. The next day or two will settle the business, one way or the other. Let's have a council of war."

V

WE sat down and we lit our pipes and discussed this struggle of two men against the earth, as if we talked over a matter of daily business.

"It comes to a question of bluff," Harvey pronounced. "The destruction of the searchers round this quarter, and here only, has given them a pretty clear idea where we hang out. If they knew how the business was worked, they would rush in on us faster than we could graph them and blot them out. It would be a matter of ten minutes! But they don't know. They think that we can destroy every one and everything, at any rate, in London, at any moment. So they won't come, unless a great leader arises. Even then it will take him some time to

(Continued on page 31)



The vase that had been in my hands was gone!